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SUBJECT: OMAN MEDIA REACTION

1. SUMMARY: While the state daily "Oman" praised U.S. efforts toward Israeli-Palestinian peace, private daily "Al-Watan" accused the American administration of a weak stand on the issue, decrying a lack of firmness toward Israel. "Al-Watan" also suggested that the Israeli Prime Minister's proposals came at the wrong time at the end of his presidency, rendering any talk or meeting with him useless.
END SUMMARY

SECRETARY "DEDICATED" TO THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

2. On August 26, "Oman" (government-owned Arabic daily, circulation 38,000) hailed positive U.S. efforts, as represented by the Secretary of State's visits to the region, in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli issue, "Trials to Solve Real Obstacles":

"The visit by American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the region - the seventh to the Middle East since the Annapolis Conference for Peace in Washington - makes her the American foreign minister that has most visited the area, as well as the one most dedicated in time and effort to trying to reach a Palestinian-Israeli agreement, one that maintains what U.S. President Bush has promised: the establishment of a viable Palestinian state that continues to live side by side with Israel. Taking into consideration Rice's statements about the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the possibility of reaching an agreement before end of Bush presidency, it seems the situation is moving towards greater relaxation in one way or another. The deliberately high tone used by Secretary Rice in her statements against Israeli abuses in the occupied Palestinian territories, which included criticizing Israeli programs to expand settlements, is merely a mechanism to shake and move forward negotiations that are scheduled to result in an agreement to establish a Palestinian state by next January. However, it appears that Israel intends to swim in the opposite direction - one that does not match the goals set by Washington."

A "WEAK" AMERICAN ROLE

3. Private Arabic daily "Al Watan" (circulation 42,000) On August 28 accused America of a weak and disappointing role regarding the Palestinian-Israeli issue, suggesting that the U.S. has not put enough pressure on Israel, saying "The Issue is Easy, but the Will is Absent":

"The description given by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state - that it is "not easy" does not indicate a real solution to the issue. This comes despite ongoing Palestinian-Israeli negotiations to reach genuine peace between the two sides, eventually leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel (as U.S.

officials have repeated constantly) and putting an end to all the complications arising from the Arab-Israeli conflict. Her words raise frustration rather than optimism, because the American administration knows that the Israeli side is the problem, one that often places obstacles and invents arguments to break all their commitments. This description also reveals a weak American role, not an active and influential one. Their role is limited to encouraging the Palestinian and Israeli sides to conduct negotiations only and to exclude any neutral third party from attending the negotiations, which could contribute to building confidence and pushing the parties to engage in discussing core issues: borders, refugees, and Jerusalem. If there was a real desire and solid will by the U.S. administration to move forward to achieve its proposed initiatives, conferences, and road map, given the ability to pressure its ally Israel, it would have been different today, and the atmosphere of optimism and confidence in the skies of the Palestinian territories would have prevailed".

OLMERT'S PEACE "A GIFT HE DOES NOT HAVE"

¶4. "Al-Watan" on September 1, expressed hopelessness regarding any Israeli effort carried out while the Israeli Prime Minister is leaving office, "Olmert's Proposals Logic in Wrong Time":

"Israeli leaders are fond of talking about peace, negotiations, and plans of permanent solutions when they near the end of their political careers. Everyone knows that Olmert does not have any authority to talk on behalf of Israel; hence his meeting with the Palestinian president has no meaning - nor do his proposals, regardless of their logic. Olmert's talk about plans of permanent

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solutions and his readiness to provide a time frame to end negotiations is like presenting a gift that he does not have. He should prepare to leave his office calmly, without turning his political opponents against him, because they will not approve any such proposals on their own behalf. The only thing that Israel can do even during political crisis is to continue its violence against the Palestinians."

GRAPPO